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S E C R E T.

W.P. (39) 71.

✓ COPY NO. 24

WAR CABINET.VIEWS OF GENERAL SMUTS ON POSSIBLE
GERMAN PEACE OFFER.Note by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

My colleagues will be interested to see the attached copy of a telegram from General Smuts to the Union High Commissioner in London, on the subject of the attitude to be adopted towards a possible German peace offer.

(Intd.) A.E.

Dominions Office.

S.W.1.

5th October, 1939.

ENCLOSURE.

DECODE OF TELEGRAM FROM PRIME MINISTER, PRETORIA
TO HIGH COMMISSIONER, LONDON.

DESPATCHED PRETORIA - 4th October, 1939.

RECEIVED LONDON - 4th October, 1939.

No.410. Your telegram of 29th September No.477, I
submit following remarks on peace discussion you report.

Any German peace offer now will not be sincere but
will be simply meant as a peace offensive to weaken us.
It will be dangerous for two reasons: (a) idea of peace
is infectious and our entry into peace discussions at this
early stage might have serious effects in weakening the
at present firm and unanimous will to resist which is a
great moral and military asset. (b) Germany has just
won first round in a spectacular way and our apparent
willingness to take peace talks now might be construed by
neutral and world opinion as a tacit admission that we
are not certain of our ability to see the struggle through
and neutrals might take hint and make terms with Germany
while there is yet time.

To my mind any peace offensive now should be met in
a resolute spirit which would prevent any such defeatist
impression. A peace offer should be met by preliminary
demand of an agreement for a restoration of the status quo
ante both in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Any apparent
weakening on our part at this stage would be a fatal mistake.

(2) A resolute attitude is all the more necessary
as President Roosevelt made an appeal for a peace conference
before attack on Poland which was contemptuously rejected
by Germany. To appear willing to enter peace talks now
without demanding at least Polish restoration might create
a lamentable impression in America. It is very important
for our cause to keep American opinion and moral support

increasingly with us. Indeed any peace moves which do not in some way bring United States into picture may prove a mistake. It might be considered advisable to consult Government of United States informally on any German peace offer especially in view of President Roosevelt's earlier initiative.

(3) As regards argument that Russia has also taken part in partition of Poland without our looking upon[‡] her as an enemy, the case and guilt of Russia differ materially from that of Germany and there is no good ground at present for assuming Russia has acted otherwise than in self defence against menace which Germany's rapid advance constituted to her interests. Even admitting the disreputable character of Russia's intervention, the great difference between the two cases call at present for different treatment and this should be insisted on for guidance public opinion. It is of course possible that future developments may place Russia's action in a more sinister light but there is no reason to assume that at present.

(4) As against any German peace offensive after what has happened I am all for an attitude of deliberate firmness and strength and confidence. Germany's military weakness is greater and her moral weakness much greater than in 1914. To manifold dangers of Nazism world is far more alive than it was in 1914 to menace of Prussianism[‡]. It would be fatal mistake to undermine by weak peace moves the immensely stonger moral position we occupy to-day. Hitlerism is universally recognised as a menace to every fundamental aspect of our Western civilisation.

Use your influence in this direction and if you think it advisable give Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs a copy of this telegram.